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UNCLAS DHAKA 003176

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: CDA RAISES CONCERN ABOUT ALLEGED NSI HARASSMENT
OF USG LABOR PROGRAM PARTNERS

¶1. (SBU) Summary. CDA expressed concern to BDG officials over reports of escalating harassment by a BDG intelligence officer of USG labor program partners and personnel, including an American citizen. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) Since summer 2004, the USAID-funded American Center for International Labor Solidarity (ACILS), along with its Bangladesh partner, Bangladesh Independent Garment Worker's Federation (BIGUF), has worked to resolve long-standing unpaid wages and forced unpaid overtime violations at a factory in Gazipur, located 30 kilometers north of Dhaka. According to ACILS, Taj Knitting, the workers, BIGUF and the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers Association (BGMEA) worked to resolve the matter but have been unsuccessful.

¶3. (SBU) Since February 2005, workers at Taj Knitting, with BIGUF's assistance, have attempted to form a union but have been reportedly subject to threats, acts of intimidation, public newspaper attacks, overt violence, sexual harassment and police surveillance. On February 10, when two officers from National Security Intelligence (NSI), Deputy Assistant Directors Mazmul Ahsan and Mohammad Istiaque Ahmed, visited ACILS offices when the AMCIT Country Director was absent and successfully asked for the Amcit's home address and other personal information. On June 19, the Amcit notified poloff that in the past month he had been surveilled, his actions recorded, and members of a garment makers trade association had called for his removal from Bangladesh.

¶4. (SBU) On June 21, ACILS told poloff that another NSI officer named Mamunur Rashid visited BIGUF offices in Dhaka to interview BIGUF's Secretary General, Nazma Akter, during which they asked her about BIGUF's membership, programs, budget, sources of funding, and BIGUF's relationship with ACILS.

¶5. (SBU) Since then, Nazma told poloff, the NSI officer has returned at least five times asking for additional documents such as bio data with photos of all of BIGUF staff, BIGUF's constitution, its bank, her passport, and a copy of the BIGUF-ACILS agreement. He also told Nazma to advise him when she travels and whom she meets, including her visits to the US Embassy. She told poloff that he said if Taj Knitting loses business because of her, "they will take some action."

¶6. (SBU) On July 6, CDA asked in separate meetings Foreign Minister Morshed Khan and Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister Kamal Siddiqui to clarify NSI's actions and explain any concerns it might have about BIGUF's or the Solidarity Center's lawful activities. Khan agreed that threats would be a serious matter and, along with Siddiqui, undertook to make inquiries. We are also raising the matter directly with NSI.

CHAMMAS